

A Workbook on Contemporary Film Theory

by Chuck Kleinhans

to accompany D87-2

This workbook and the organization of this course reflect my fundamental belief that people learn the most and learn best when confronted with new and presumably difficult material in the human sciences if they have to deal with the same fundamental concerns and ideas in a variety of contexts. Learning, in such a situation, is not linear and progressive. Instead it involves going back and forth, making connections, drawing from one's own past experience and present reflection. Typically then learning is characterized by uneven development.

This course is intended to be demanding and challenging; but you are competing against yourself. You will be exposed to a lot of material and new ideas in a variety of ways. Readings are essential. You should do them carefully and on time. In each case I will give you an idea about how to study the material-- closely, for a rapid overview, or whatever. I suggest you use underlining and marginal notation as a study technique. Classroom I expect you to attend all classes except in case of illness or extreme personal hardship. Most of the time I will be lecturing with the intent of providing a broad survey of material, at times explicating it closely, and often demonstrating ideas with films. (I will often talk during the film, if this ruins your need for a pristine experience, check the film out and see it before class on your own.) Assignments. You will have short written work due about every week and a half. This must be prepared for distribution to the entire class. Dittoes are available in 212; if you xerox, you pay for it yourself. Late work loses one letter grade for every class meeting. Study groups. You are expected to meet for two hours once a week with other students for a structured study group. You will have a rough assignment or set of ideas from me to get started, but the group can modify this however it wants. You can set up groups on any basis-- time, interest, friendship, or whatever. Each group must have at least three and no more than six members. The purpose is to have people teach each other and discuss the ideas presented in readings and lectures. Details will be explained in a handout.

Although the title of the course is 'theory,' you will be actively involved in practice-- the practice of mastering and making theory.

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R-T-F

D87-2 Contemporary Film Theory

Winter Quarter, MW 1-3, 325 Annie May Swift, plus 2 hour weekly study group

Chuck Kleinhans

Prerequisite D87-1 or consent of instructor

The course presumes a knowledge of classical film theory (as introduced, and surveyed in J. Dudley Andrew, The Major Film Theories, as ~~presented~~ in Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen, Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings, second edition) and techniques of close formal analysis (as presented in David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, Film Art: An Introduction and/or as taught in R-T-F production and criticism courses).

The goals of the course are

(1) to provide a basic introduction to some major trends in post-Bazin film theory and criticism for people studying contemporary theory for the first time,

(2) to provide the student with background in primary theoretical work (sometimes not dealing with film per se) which can be used to evaluate the validity of different theoretical positions,

(3) to understand a variety of issues being developed and debated in recent film theory, particularly in four interrelated areas--marxism, particularly the concept of ideology; structuralism, as theory and methodology in the human sciences and semiology, the linguistics-influenced study of communications; psychoanalysis (Freudian psychology); and resistance cultures, with an emphasis on feminist theory.

The course will consist of lectures providing background and analysis, readings, individual study using a workbook, and small weekly study groups. Required work includes attendance, participation in a study group which will have weekly assignments such as discussion of a common reading or group analysis of a film or film segment, and written assignments (short papers due every 2 weeks or so). A final exam will be given out in the last class which will be written in class at the scheduled exam time.

Required texts:

Henri Arvon, Marxist Esthetics

Bertolt Brecht, On Theatre

Terence Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics

Chuck Kleinhans, A Workbook in Contemporary Film Theory

Susan Sontag, On Photography

Raymond Williams, Keywords

JUMP CUT 24/25

The books will be available in Norris Center Store, except for the Kleinhans' one which will be sold in class the first day and JUMP CUT 24/25 which will be published in February and available then.

Other readings will be on reserve and/or available as handouts.

A more detailed breakdown of the following schedule will be available in the first class.

Jan 5 Introduction to course
lecture--What is film theory?
The situation of film theory circa 1968

Jan 7 lecture--A paradigm for film analysis

Study Group 1 discuss the Gauthier and Seiter slides

Jan 12 lecture--analysis of the image
introduction to semiotics and structuralism
films Bruce Baillie ALL MY LIFE
Bruce Connor VALSE TRISTE
Stan Brakhage THE WOLD SHADOW

Jan 14 lecture--analysis of the image, 2
films ~~Joris Ivens and Henri Storck BO~~
Peter Hutton, IMAGES OF ASIAN MUSIC
Joris Ivens and Henri Storck MISERY IN THE BORINAGE

SG 2 discuss readings

Jan 19 lecture--the Classic Hollywood Film
demonstration--techniques of close analysis

Jan 21 film LADY BE GOOD (McLeod)

SG 3 discuss readings

Jan 26 lecture/demonstration --a ~~close analysis~~ close analysis of LADY BE GOOD

Jan 28 lecture--Heterogeneity and multiplicity in film texts--
The concept of subtexts

SG 4 discuss film excerpt

Feb 2 film--UP IN ARMS (Elliot Nugent, 1944)

Feb 4 lecture--introduction to Marxism

SG 5 close analysis of UP IN ARMS

Feb 9 lecture--the marxist analysis of art and culture

Feb 11 lecture--Brecht vs. Lukacs, the realism debate

SG 6 discuss readings

Feb 16 lecture--theory of mass culture
Third World theories of radical film

Feb 18 Lecture--the concept of ideology, 1
film, Dana Hodgdon, DEAR FRIENDS

SG 7 discuss readings

Feb 23 Lecture--ideology, 2
films George Griffin THE CLUB
Agnes Varda WOMEN'S ANSWER

Feb 25 lecture--psychoanalysis, 1

SG 8 discuss film ~~(1944)~~ Maya Deren, MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON

Mar 2 lecture--psychoanalysis, 2

Mar 4 lecture--theory of the subject
the film theory film

films-- Ellen Seiter, ★ MAIN STREET
Michelle Citron, INTEGRATION

SG 9 discuss readings

Mar 9 lecture--a theory of comedy
film Kleinhans, SHIRLEY AND BRUCE or (if completed)
ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Mar 11 films Barbara Hammer, MENSES
Vera Chytilova, DAISIES

SG 10 course review

What is a pundit?

What assumptions about films, society, and their relation are contained in the following passage?

has been noticed that the people most drawn to movies are loners and misfits, who find great comfort watching fantasies played out in an anonymous darkness that requires nothing of the viewer. Thus, the gang film offers the loner a fantasy family for two hours.

And if that is true, maybe what happened with the violent reaction to "The Warriors" last week is that too many young people found the family of "The Warriors" more comfortable than their own.

If that's the case, then the boom in gang films is yet another indication of a tragic fact of contemporary American life: the destruction of the family unit.

If a kid can't find a worthwhile family at home, Hollywood will sell him one for \$3.50 in a movie theater.

Can we make any assumptions about the nature of art under capitalism from the above item? Why or why not? What about the following example from a distributor's catalogue?

AESCHYLUS

Faster Pussycat, Kill, Kill!

83 minutes. 1966. Black and white.

This unusual, modern treatment of Aeschylus's THE EUMENIDES, by pop director Russ Meyer is certain to stimulate more than an average amount of controversy and discussion. The depiction of the Furies as killer go-go dancers may be considered somewhat strange, but the interpretation is truly intriguing.

Standard: \$200

High School: \$125